

Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® Degree Requirements and Accreditation

National Strength and Conditioning Association Announces Changes that will Advance the Strength and Conditioning Profession

The National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) has announced that it is working to elevate and advance the strength and conditioning profession by developing a quality assurance process that ensures all future professionals are capable and well-prepared. This process establishes a qualified workforce that has the professional knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to meet industry standards and be successful in the strength and conditioning industry. To achieve this, the NSCA is taking forward-thinking steps by modifying the requirements to attain the Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® (CSCS®) certification. These requirements are targeted to take effect in the year 2030.

There will be two principal changes to the certification process:

1. Effective target date 2030, all CSCS exam candidates must hold a Bachelor's degree in a strength and conditioning related field, or be enrolled as a senior in such a program.
2. Effective target date 2030, candidates will need to obtain those degrees from a college or university that has a program accredited by an NSCA-approved accrediting agency.

Anyone currently holding the CSCS credential or earning a CSCS credential before December 31, 2029 will NOT be affected by the new degree requirement.

Questions and Answers

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Why is the degree requirement changing?

In May 2017, the NSCA conducted a survey of strength and conditioning coaches and discovered that 87% of respondents were in favor of requiring that candidates hold a degree from an accredited strength and conditioning program prior to employment. This is a concerted effort to elevate and advance the strength and conditioning profession.

What are the new CSCS degree requirements?

Targeted to take effect beginning in 2030 – to be eligible to take the CSCS examination, candidates must hold a Bachelor's degree from a program accredited by an NSCA-approved accrediting agency.

This degree will have specific requirements that focus on strength and conditioning. The current degree requirement for the CSCS exam will remain in place until December 31, 2029.

What is the difference between the current and new degree requirement? |

The current degree requirement is: “Candidates must hold at least a Bachelor’s degree or currently be enrolled as a college senior at an accredited institution.” This means that currently, as long as the college or university is accredited, a Bachelor’s degree in any field of study is acceptable. The NSCA Education and Certification Committees and the Board of Directors (in consideration of the membership and their constituencies), feel that this requirement needs to change and evolve to include degree requirements that are specific to the profession, to create a higher standard and ensure that future CSCS professionals have a strong foundation of strength and conditioning knowledge.

What degree will I need to have to be eligible to sit for the CSCS exam starting in 2030?

A Bachelor’s degree from a program accredited by an NSCA–approved accrediting agency, in a strength and conditioning related field. This means that the degree must be related to the academic and experiential needs of the strength and conditioning profession. This change will align the CSCS with other allied healthcare professions, such as medical doctors, nurses, physical therapists and athletic trainers.

When will the new CSCS degree requirement begin?

The change to the degree requirement is targeted to go into effect in 2030. There will be a structured roll–out of the accreditation process so that all colleges and universities that wish to participate will have ample time to engage in the accreditation process. This is why the extended timeline has been established.

ACCREDITATION

Why is Accreditation important?

Accreditation has many benefits for the strength and conditioning profession, the accredited program and its students. It will facilitate admissions recruitment efforts and promote program enrollment growth. Accreditation also adds value for prospective students and the profession by providing quality assurance of higher education programs to ensure a well–prepared and qualified workforce that meets industry standards, as well as the professional knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to be successful in the strength and conditioning industry.

What is Accreditation?

Accreditation is a process of validation in which colleges, universities and other institutions of higher learning are evaluated. In the United States, accreditation is a voluntary quality assurance process that symbolizes to the public that an institution and/or individual programs provide a quality education. The standards for accreditation are set by a peer review board whose members include faculty from various accredited colleges and universities.

What are the types of Accreditation?

In post–secondary education, there are two kinds of accreditation: Institutional and Programmatic. Institutional accreditation helps assure potential students that a college or university has met certain

minimum standards in terms of administration, resources, faculty and facilities. Programmatic accreditation examines specific program(s) within an educational institution.

Will the NSCA–approved accrediting agency be an Institutional or Programmatic agency?

The NSCA–approved accrediting agency will be a Programmatic accrediting agency. This reflects a change to the current standard – prior to 2030, the NSCA only required Institutional accreditation.

What is the process for an educational program to become accredited through this accrediting agency?

All accredited programs must go through a rigorous process, including:

- Application
- Self-Study
- On-Site Evaluation
- Committee Review and Recommendation
- Commission Decision Rendered

When will the first academic programs be eligible to apply for accreditation?

Academic programs will be able to apply for accreditation in 2022

IMPACT

How will this affect me?

Current CSCS Credential Holders:

The change in the degree requirement will NOT have any impact on current credential holders. Individuals holding a CSCS on December 31, 2029 will be able to recertify and keep the CSCS. The current requirement for the exam will remain in place until December 31, 2029.

Potential/Future CSCS Credential Holders:

Targeted to take effect beginning in 2030, all candidates seeking the CSCS credential will be required to have a degree from an NSCA–approved strength and conditioning program.

NSCA International Affiliates:

The change in degree requirement will NOT have any impact on current credential holders. The current requirement for the exam will remain in place until December 31, 2029. The NSCA–approved accrediting agency will be establishing global standards and guidelines for programmatic accreditation.

Education Recognition Program (ERP) Schools Recognized by the NSCA:

Portions of the NSCA ERP program will be phased out by 2030, in the hopes that these schools transition to become accredited programs. It is anticipated that many of the current requirements for an ERP program will be consistent with the expectation of an accredited program.

Questions?

We understand this announcement will generate a lot of questions. At this stage in the process not all details have been solidified. As the new accreditation agency is created and begins to make decisions and establish guidelines we will continue to update and add information to this webpage to keep you apprised of the new developments.

Please submit your accreditation and degree requirement questions to us at Accreditation@NSCA.com. We anticipate a high volume of questions so please be patient, we will respond as soon as possible.

STAY INFORMED

Sign up to receive updates about accreditation and degree requirement changes.